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ABSTRACT

A study that compared occupational [illegible]ment before and after adult education shows that economic bac[illegible]nd participation in education as an adult does not he[illegible]s attain better jobs as much as it helps whites. Thus, the oc[illegible]tional attainment of blacks is not significantly related to their participation in education after age 25. The study described relationships among these variables, based on 4,900 observations with complete information: social background (educational background as represented by parents' educational levels and economic background as represented by father's occupation and family income), educational aspiration, formal schooling achievement at age 25, education after age 25, and occupational attainment at age 32. The observations were available from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS). About 12,980 individuals participated in all 6 surveys of the NLS. The study also found that for both blacks and whites, the effects of educational background on economic background and educational aspiration; of educational aspiration on educational attainment at age 25; and of educational attainment at age 25 on occupational attainment were all significant. That was true no matter what school (vocational or business training school; community college; university; or law, dentistry, or other professional schools) the subjects attended. (CML)

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Adult education and inequality

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Background of the study

The mission of adult education is to promote political, social and economic equality in American society. It has been seen as the second chance for disadvantaged individuals to promote their social and economic position.

Although adult education is intended to be a device to modify the educational outcome of formal schooling, it has been claimed that it actually does more to maintain existing social inequalities than reduces them. Unfortunately, there has been little research on the role of adult education in social status attainment. This paper, in trying to address this research void, is intended to investigate and compare the process of adult education and occupational attainment between blacks and whites.

Data resources

This study is based on data bank, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, a rich data bank consisting of 6 surveys conducted in 1972, 1973, 1974, 1976, 1979 and 1986. Totally about 12,980 individuals had provided information through all the surveys.

Variables in the study

This study describes the relationships among social background, educational aspiration, formal schooling achievement, education after age 25, and occupational attainment at the age 32. See figure 1 for the theoretical relationship among the variables. About 4900 observations with complete information are selected for analysis.

Social background is represented by two measurement: educational and economic background and are conceptualized as two separate latent variables that fit better into the structure. Educational background is constructed by father's and mother's educational levels. Economic background is constructed by father's occupation and family income. These variables are based on 1972 and 1973 surveys when subjects were 19.

Student's educational aspiration is another factor that influences educational attainment at age 25 and participation in adult education after age 25. This latent variable is measured by the student's wish for highest education and student's actual plan at the age of 19 based on 1973 survey, so that student's educational aspiration is moderated by actual plan.

The variable participation in education after age 25 is measured by whether the student took credited adult education between the age of 25 and 32, which is based on a retrospective question in 1986 survey when subjects were 32. The variable participation in adult education includes four types of schools: 1) vocational, business training school, 2) community colleges, 3) 4 years university, and 4) law, dentist and other professional schools.

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Duncan's occupational prestige score is calculated based on the occupations subjects have reported in 1986 survey at the age of 32. This variable serves as the occupational attainment since Duncan's score is a composite measure of the occupation's income level and social reputation. It is reasonable to use Duncan's prestige score as a measure of the outcome of individual's educational process.

Method

The statistical package LISREL is required for the complex causal relationship as stated above. Firstly a general model is constructed on the population including blacks and whites (containing measurement and structural models). Then, in order to compare the effect of each variable between black and white sub-groups, the base model is tested for black and white separately. Each group is again divided into four type of schools because each type of adult education may have a distinct influence on occupational attainment. Totally 8 models are tested. Figure 1 and 2 display 2 of the 8 models. Due to the space limitation, the other 6 will be presented in a full-length paper.

Result

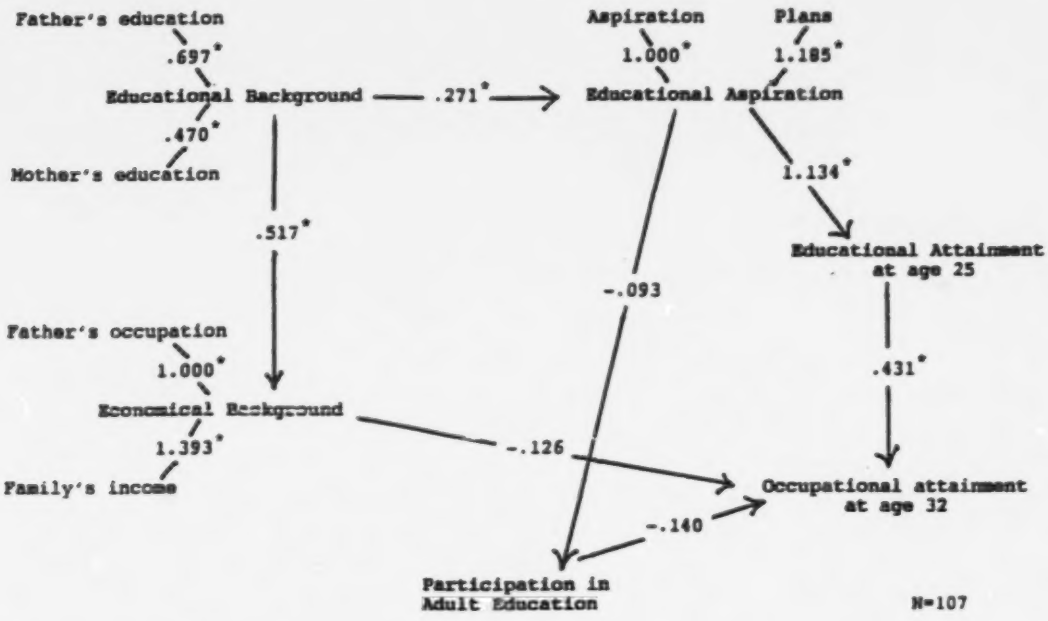
Due to the unbalance sample size of blacks and whites groups, strict statistical criteria make a cross group unstandardized coefficients comparison invalid. Yet the comparison using significance versus non-significance is legitimate and sensible for this situation.

The effect of educational background on economic background and on educational aspiration, educational aspiration on educational attainment at age 25, educational attainment at age 25 on occupational attainment are significant through all 4 types of school for both blacks and whites. The difference between blacks and whites appears on the effect of aspiration on participation in adult education, the effect of participation in adult education on occupational prestige score and the effect of economic background on occupational prestige score at the level of both blacks vs. white, and across 4 type of schools.

For blacks, educational aspiration does not affect participation in adult education in vocational, business training school or community colleges, but affects the other two type of schools. For whites, educational aspiration has no effect on participation in adult education for vocational, business training school, but has an effect on the other three type of schools. For blacks, economic background does not affect occupational attainment on all 4 types of schools but affect whites occupational attainment on all 4 types of schools. Participation in adult education does not have any effect on blacks occupational attainment but has an effect on whites on 4 years university and professional schools.

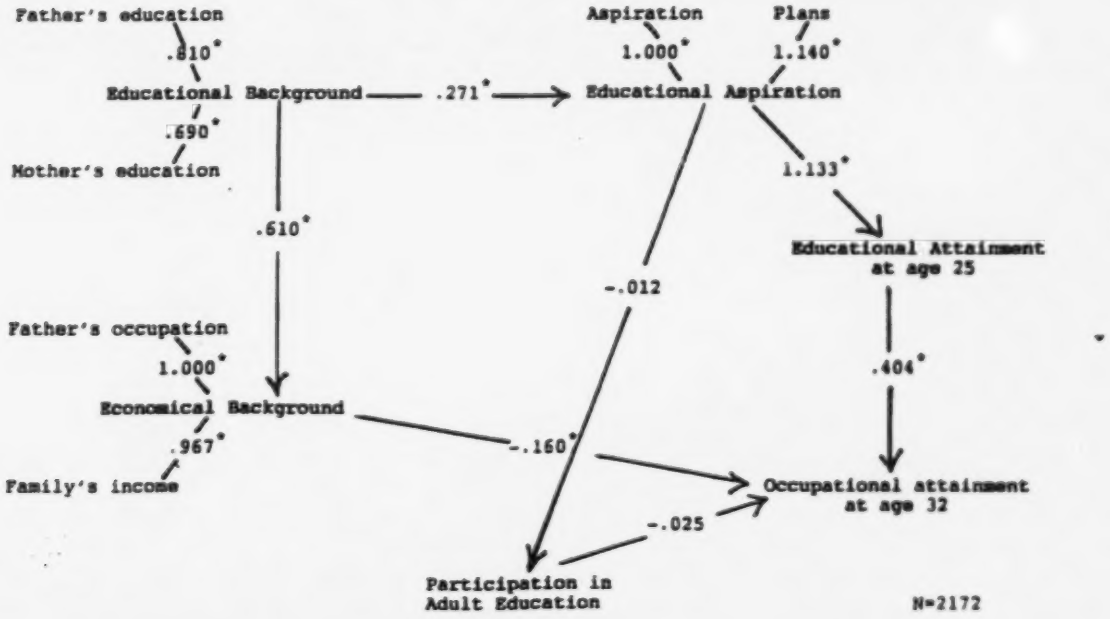
In summary, this research shows that economic background and participation in adult education does not help blacks as well as whites in terms of occupational attainment. No matter what type of adult education blacks participate in, their occupational attainment does not show any significant relationship.

Figure 1. Model for Black participants on vocational, trade, business training school.



Note: 1. The above coefficients are unstandardized B.
2. * indicate p value under .05 level.

Figure 2. Model for White participants on vocational, trade business training school.



Note: 1. The above coefficients are unstandardized B.
2. * indicate p value less than .05 level.